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DEPARTMENT FOR AF/EX AND AF/E

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [ER](#) [LY](#)

SUBJECT: ISAIAS AND QADHAFI HUDDLE IN MASSAWA

REF: TRIPOLI 134

Classified By: Ambassador Ronald K. McMullen for reason 1.4(d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: AU Chairman Muammar al-Qadhafi flew to the Red Sea port city of Massawa, spending February 6-8 in coastal Eritrea on a "working visit" with President Isaias. Qadhafi urged Isaias to resolve the deadlocked Eritrea-Ethiopia border dispute. While in Massawa, Qadhafi also met with Sheikh Aweys, leader of the hard-line faction of the Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia (ARS), and called on him to support Somalia's new unity government. End Summary.

12. (C) HELLO! ANYBODY HOME?  
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Libyan CDA Al-Hassan Ali Al-Barouni said he received a call from Qadhafi's entourage at 2:00 a.m. February 6 informing him that Colonel Qadhafi and a delegation of 200 people in six planes were arriving in Massawa in ten hours. The Libyan CDA scrambled to rouse the Eritrean government, rent cars, arrange lodging, and drive to the coast. He was horrified to find the GSE intended to put Qadhafi and his family in a recently renovated beach house that lacked kitchen utilities, air conditioning, and had "only a little water." Once the delegation arrived (from Addis Ababa, but reportedly traveling circuitously via Djibouti airspace) Libyan aviators asked to purchase 19,000 liters of fuel to complete their return trip to Tripoli. Eritrean airport officials refused. Eventually (and typically), the issue went all the way up to Isaias, who authorized the sale of jet fuel. Qadhafi brought at least one cargo plane "for his hunting vehicle and other items," according to the Libyan CDA. Qadhafi previously visited Eritrea in 2003.

13. (C) GUY FUN -- CAMPING, HUNTING, 4X4 OFF-ROADING  
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The extensive Eritrean government-controlled media coverage of Qadhafi's visit was light on substance, instead emphasizing the camaraderie, trust, and brotherhood supposedly existing between the two dictators and their countries. The chief of a Rashaida group (nomadic Arabic-speakers) lent Qadhafi a tent, which Qadhafi pitched in the front yard of the beach house and happily slept in. Qadhafi brought at least one SUV and a rifle with him and went hunting in the arid Buri Peninsula. The Libyan CDA said the AU Chairman bagged "a small ostrich, some animals like deer, and some birds that looked like small chickens." The Eritrean press featured a photo of Qadhafi behind the wheel of his 4x4, wearing a pork-pie hat, protective ear muffs, and sunglasses, while holding a rifle out the window.

14. (C) QADHAFI: SOLVE BORDER DISPUTE, HELP SOMALIA MEND

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The Libyan leader, hoping to pave the way for greater African unity, pressed Isaias hard to resolve the stalemated border dispute with Ethiopia. The Libyan CDA said this was the most important issue, as "many other conflicts would go away - Djibouti, Somalia, and others - if this problem was fixed." He added that Qadhafi had also discussed this with PM Meles in Addis. The AU Chairman met with hard-line ARS faction chief Hasan Dahir Aweys. Qadhafi urged Sheikh Aweys to support the newly formed Somali unity government headed by Libyan-educated Sheik Sharif, and then invited Aweys to visit Tripoli, according to a non-Libyan source. Isaias and Qadhafi also discussed Darfur, Djibouti, and potential Libyan investments in tourism, aviation, and Massawa's free-zone. Colonel Qadhafi left "very happy," according to the somewhat frazzled Libyan CDA.

15. (C) COMMENT: If Qadhafi did indeed press Isaias to resolve the border dispute with Ethiopia and help stabilize Somalia, he likely did so to foster his own vision of African unity (REF). Whatever his motivation, both messages are good ones for Isaias to hear, particularly from a ruler he apparently respects. The Eritrean reaction to Qadhafi's urgings appears to have been muted, but polite. End Comment.

MCMULLEN